

VZCZCXRO0845
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHRN
DE RUEHMR #0607/01 3240929
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 200929Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3447
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3848

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000607

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO OPPOSITION CALLS FOR SUSPENSION OF MCC FUNDING

REF: MASERU 476

MASERU 00000607 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) Summary: Lesotho's political opposition parties, still aggrieved that they were outmaneuvered by the governing LCD party during the country's February 2007 national election, staged a walk-out in Parliament on November 14 and a protest march on November 16, drawing attention in part to their standing call for a suspension of foreign assistance. Claiming that the GOL has failed to promote political and economic freedom and to respect civil liberties, opposition parties also delivered a letter to the U.S. Embassy, reiterating their call for a halt to Lesotho's \$362.5 million MCC compact. There is no indication, however, that USG policies or assistance, including the MCC compact, are genuine targets of the opposition. In fact, opposition leaders have privately apologized to Emboffs for their posture. Instead, the opposition is desperately hoping that the international community will sympathize with its grievances against the GOL. The vast majority of Basotho, however, realize and highly appreciate direct benefit from foreign aid programs, particularly those focused on HIV/AIDS and economic development. End Summary.

Tools of Democracy: Petition, March, and Boycott

12. (U) On Friday November 16, several thousand supporters of Lesotho's political opposition staged a peaceful march throughout central Maseru, delivering letters to the Office of the Prime Minister and to the U.S. Embassy. The primary focus of the marchers, representing the so-called "Big Five" opposition parties (All Basotho Convention-ABC, Alliance of Congress Parties-ACP; Basotho National Party-BNP; Marematlou Freedom Party-MFP; and the National Independent Party-NIP), was a demand that the GOL respond to a July 2007 petition in which the opposition alleged human rights violations by security and law enforcement officials against opposition members during a post-election political impasse.

13. (U) In a letter to the U.S. Embassy, signed by ABC deputy leader Sello Machakela, the opposition parties called for "support to pressurize American Government not focus to China more than Lesotho with regard to Textile and Garment Markets" (sic), an apparent though uncertain appeal for a continuation of Lesotho's preferential access under AGOA to U.S. textile and garment markets following the lapse of the Multi-Fiber Agreement. The opposition letter also urged USG "compliance with the rules and conditions of Millennium Challenge," referring to a July press release in which the opposition parties had demanded a halt to all foreign assistance to the GOL, including Lesotho's \$362.5 million MCC compact, claiming that the GOL had violated MCC selection criteria by failing to promote political and economic freedom, invest in education and health, control corruption, and respect civil liberties

(reftel).

¶4. (U) On November 14, prior to the march, opposition parties boycotted a motion in Parliament, introduced by a GOL-allied party, that "applauded the efforts of the U.S. Government and its people" for financing development projects in Lesotho, including the MCC compact. Leaders of the opposition alliance stated in Parliament that, while they support the MCC compact, they are concerned the GOL is withholding details on the conditions for maintaining MCC eligibility.

A Peaceful March

¶5. (U) Municipal and security authorities granted the political opposition a permit for the November 16 march, which was orderly and peaceful, although participation was less robust than opposition rallies and demonstrations held earlier in the year. The Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS), which provided extra security around the U.S. Embassy's perimeter, restricted marchers to a route that passed several hundred meters from the Embassy compound. A delegation of five opposition members approached the Embassy gate and presented their "petition" (a letter addressed to the Ambassador), which the Post Security Officer received.

Comment: An Opposition Grasping for Straws

¶6. (SBU) The political opposition's main bone of contention is that it was outmaneuvered in a contest of dueling alliances during the February 2007 national election, the results of which returned the governing LCD party to power. The ensuing political impasse, which has sparked occasional violence and attacks against senior political figures, has centered around an unresolved debate over the country's Mixed Member Proportional (MPP) parliamentary model. The impasse, intermittently mediated by former Botswana President Masire under the auspices of SADC,

MASERU 00000607 002.2 OF 002

has pitted the LCD government, unwilling to yield any power or influence to the opposition, primarily against ABC leader Tom Thabane, a former GOL minister who is leading fairly fruitless efforts to reallocate parliamentary seats.

¶7. (SBU) There is no indication that USG policies or assistance, including the MCC compact, are genuine targets of the opposition. In fact, opposition leaders have privately apologized to Emboffs for the November 14 walk-out in Parliament and reaffirmed their general support for the highly visible presence of the United States in Lesotho. In calling for a suspension of foreign aid, the opposition is desperately hoping that the international community will sympathize with its grievances against the GOL. Although the opposition raised some legitimate concerns over civil liberties during a brief chaotic period in June, including a two-week curfew, neither resident diplomatic missions nor the general public have responded favorably to opposition's position on foreign assistance. To the contrary, the vast majority of Basotho realize, and highly appreciate, direct benefit from foreign aid programs, particularly those focused on HIV/AIDS and economic development.

End Comment.

NOLAN